

A NEW CRANFORD; BEING A MORE OR LESS TRUE ACCOUNT OF AN EXPERIMENT

DEDICATED TO OUR DEAR J. B., WHO OF ALL OTHERS BEST
UNDERSTANDS WHAT PROMPTED ITS UNDERTAKING

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VII. THE REFORMATION OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

As the winter waned Billy began to "feel his oats" and made any journeys of mine a constant terror.

He had one particular place at the railway crossing for showing off—not that he had an atom of fear of the trains, but like some two-legged beasts he loves an audience, and the instant his eye would light upon the old flag-man at the crossing he began to wiggle, prance sideways and otherwise deport himself like a giggly girl when the right young man appears. We were always expecting that our buggy top would fly into space with his jerks across the tracks. Euphemia wore one of those wretched hats with the very small crown and very wide brim, which, combined with Bill's antics and a high wind, nearly scalped her several times.

When the warm weather came on and it was time for plowing and other hard work, Euphemia declared that she was going to do the first plowing on the nice, easy soil of the garden; that she knew if Bill only got a right start he would plow all right, for she was certain the men last year did not know how to manage him, which was the reason Bill had done no plowing. I have learned to be discreet in expressing my opinions too freely about Bill's behavior, but like the little owl "kept up a terrible thinking," resolving to arrange my own work to give me leisure to witness the performance.

One lovely warm day I heard various explosive sounds with rattling harness and stamping hoofs which grew louder and louder every minute with increasing rapidity, which I knew to be Euphemia and Bill plowing the garden, or rather they were arguing the subject.

The first glimpse I had of them was in silhouette, Bill going in leaps, the plow dragging on its side and Euphemia in an almost horizontal position trying to keep up, her commands entirely unheeded, until the fence stopped the procession.

The wretched beast was wise enough to pull the nose of the plow out the furrow on its side and then go tearing away so fast it was impossible to put it in again. They spent the whole afternoon fighting it out and at five o'clock Bill was still the conqueror, for he had not plowed a hundred feet and Euphemia was in a state of collapse.

The next day the man Friday took a hand in it with the same results. Although Friday swore loud and long and deep and beat Mr. Bill well, the latter was still conqueror and the garden not plowed. Then Euphemia and Friday tried it together, Euphemia driving and Friday trying to keep the plow in the furrow, but it was no use: Billy would not plow and we faced a serious dilemma with all the spring work waiting to be done.

Friday has a step-father-in-law who has a dray in town and who helped out with the plowing last year, and Friday suggested that Euphemia see John and exchange horses for a few weeks until the rush of work was over and John had curbed Bill's exuberant spirits somewhat.

John is wonderfully good with horses, and after a little persuasion brought out his old Dan and took our high and mighty gentleman of leisure away to pull a coal cart in town.

Old Dan was what one might call "a good soul," faithful and obedient, but as uninteresting as "good souls" usually are. Poor Euphemia's vanity suffered greatly by the exchange. She was so accustomed to driving on the wings of the wind that to jog along respectably with Dan and have every man from the banker to the butcher say "Well, you had to get rid of that horse, I see," was a sore trial and put her into such bad temper she took to going to town at night when no one could see her.

Meanwhile we expected every day to see John arriving to take Dan away, as Friday kept us informed of John's trials with Billy,—the numbers of single-trees he broke and the general ensedness of the rascal; but after a fortnight of hauling coal carts, pianos and other heavy freight Mr. Bill settled himself down to work so well that at the end of a month John was quite determined to make a permanent trade; and I think Euphemia would have yielded if Dan could have been persuaded to show some spirit at the signal of the flagman, but she so thoroughly enjoys Bill's almost human careerings that she could not trade, although Dan's plowing was perfect.

When Bill came home it was a question whether he would do as well for Euphemia as he had for John, and we watched anxiously for the trial a few days later when an old strawberry bed had to be plowed.

Friday started out and had done two or three furrows when Bill

remembered that this was his opportunity, and away went the plow again. John had told Euphemia to take him by the bridle and whip him across his fore legs and she decided that it was now or never to conquer him, so they unhitched him from the plow and she got a firm grip and gave him the surprise of his life. He reared and plunged and kicked and pawed and bit at her, but she held on and I expected to see her neck broken on the trees. She did this three times before he gave in, but at last Bill surrendered and has never had but one serious tantrum since. We had a timid visitor who had been frightened out of her wits a year ago, and only after many promises of Bill's good conduct could we induce her to get into the buggy. We assured her that Bill fairly loved an automobile and she consented to ride. At the very first corner they met an automobile and without even a preliminary switch of his tail Bill bolted into the ditch, nearly capsizing the buggy and reducing our visitor to tears. Indeed we haven't yet made peace with her; but to give Bill credit I don't believe it was the automobile which frightened him, but a huge fat woman on its front seat —without a hat, with bleached hair, calcimine complexion, sleeves rolled to the elbow of her beefy arms and an organdie dress with flowers as big as a dinner plate. The sight of her was enough to terrify man or beast.

So thorough has been Bill's reformation that I am no longer afraid to drive him down hill, and when the editor of the Journal rode behind him so polite was his deportment she ventured the opinion that William the conquerer had been slandered. He really has some very engaging ways. We did not know how much we thought of him until he was dreadfully ill from too much green corn. Euphemia doped and nursed him like a human patient, with hot water, whiskey, peppermint and opium, and like many bad children who are only good when they are sick he behaved like a cherub until his pain was gone, when he tried to kick our good neighbor who came in for consultation. I doubt if he will ever figure in a Sunday-school tract, but with all his faults we love him still.

(To be continued.)

